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CLASS CRITICISM

Class may be defined in both objective and subjective terms. Objectively, class designates the difference between those who work to produce goods and those who extract a surplus from those goods but do not produce them. This objective difference is manifested in division of labor, which operates in complex patterns of distinctions between male and female, mind and body, city and country, material and immaterial wealth. The subjective dimension involves a consciousness of belonging to a particular class. That consciousness includes a complex web of cultural assumptions, modes of speech, social codes, world outlook, and religion. Most significantly, class consciousness is determined by a class opponent, the differences with which are marked by opposing assumptions of one's role and importance within production, and by the cultural assumptions each holds. For instance, peasants regard the class that extracts their produce, whether through taxes or direct appropriation (plunder), as exploitative and cruel overlords, while those who extract such

surplus regard peasants as ignorant, lazy, earthy, uncultured, and surly.

Anachronism. The problem with modern categories of class, whether Marxist theories of class conflict or Weberian and Lenskian notions of class stratification and status, is that they have developed within the context of capitalism. So the question is: how does one deal with the inevitable anachronism of applying a term such as class to the ancient world? Any discussion of class should at all times be *aware* that it is engaged in an anachronistic task, that such anachronism is a *necessary* feature of any analysis of ancient societies, and that one *structures* the theory in order to include such anachronism in its very workings. In order to do so, the theory used should include a *narrative of difference*; that is, an account, which is continually contested and rewritten, of the vast distance travelled in time between the economy we are investigating and the one from which we undertake such investigation. It thereby stresses the profound sense of the difference between our own social formation and that of the economies (or societies, cultures, texts, and so on) we seek to study.

Technical Terminology. Technical usage usually relies on the work of social theorists, the most common being Weber and Marx. For Weber (1968, pp. 302–305), class initially refers to the layer or group that occupies a common economic situation. It also includes status, which thereby introduces a potential for multiple stratification. This approach is *gradualist*: given the complex overlaps, classes phase into one another and are defined by variables such as income and status. People move more freely between such classes as their circumstances change. A prime instance is Gerhard Lenski (1966), whose work has been used in biblical criticism. For example, Coote and Whitlam (1987) critically deploy Lenski in their reconstruction of the stratifications of Iron Age I society in ancient Israel; Saldarini (1988) argues for the role of Pharisees as “retainers;” while Theissen (1978) attempts to apply Lenski's model to Galilee in the time of Jesus. Fully aware of changes over time and due to different types of social structure, Lenski develops a complex vertical stratification of agrarian societies into twelve

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"classes," including "governing class," "ruler," "retainer class," and "priestly class." However, Lenski tends to elide categories and groups with classes.

By contrast, a Marxist approach works with sharper distinctions between classes, since objective features are combined with subjective ones of class identity (class consciousness). This is the definition with which this study began, and it is the preferred approach here, due to its richness and complexity. The advantage of such an approach is that it includes a narrative of difference, which makes use of the idea of modes of production: the totality of a social and economic situation is a unique and contradictory conjunction of items which both comes to be and eventually breaks down. What replaces it is an effort to overcome the contradictions that led to the breakdown of the former that is also qualitatively different from what has gone before. Thereby, ancient societies, despite their apparent similarities to ours, are qualitatively different in the way they are organized.

It is important to distinguish between classes, social categories, and groups, although biblical scholars often confuse them (Sneed 1999; Burke 1993). A category designates those who share a common status, such as young people, intellectuals, truck drivers, or—relevant for biblical analysis—scribes. Groups are determined by those who have common interests, ranging from two people (cockroach racers) to large organizations (Hare Krishnas). A class involves ranking, economic resources, subjective identity, and extra-class antagonisms. It is the largest and may include categories or groups.

Finally, we need to be wary of the juridical distinctions appearing in texts, for they do not necessarily match class distinctions (Zel'in 1968; D'iakonoff 1987; Liverani 2005, pp. 17–18). Juridical distinctions between people, such as those in the Hebrew Bible between Israelite and foreigner (Moabite, Ammonite, Canaanite, etc.), women and men, widow and orphan, forced laborer and slave, are not necessarily class distinctions. In fact, such distinctions effectively divide people who are in a similar class position, preventing them from unifying and gaining class-consciousness.

Within Biblical Scholarship. In light of these distinctions, we may assess the proposals made by biblical scholars. Some confuse categories and groups with class, such as McNutt's (1999, pp. 167–169) designation, among others, of scribes, judges, census takers, tax collectors, overseers of forced labor, district governors, noble families, military personnel, agriculturalists, religious professionals, artisans, and dependent laborers; or Dever's (1993) identification of artisans, common laborers, the armed forces, and royalty; or Kovacs's (1973) description of scribes as a "class." Some argue that no classes existed in ancient Israel, since the society was too simple and the data are insufficient, with the vast majority of the population involved in agriculture, a very small percentage acting as rulers, and the absence of a "middle" class (Lemche, 1999; Soggin, 1988). Lemche prefers the patron-client model over against class (Lemche 1999, 1998, p. 102; 2008, pp. 420–421).

Most use class in terms outlined earlier (in contrast to categories or groups). We may distinguish between Marxist-derived or Weberian-influenced approaches by the number of classes differentiated. The greater the number of classes, the more closely they align with a gradualist approach. For example, Handy (1995) distinguishes four classes: royalty, administrators, specialists, and slaves. Many identify three classes, with a ruling class, a class comprised of slaves, peasants, and occasionally artisans, and a class in between variously and (unfortunately) loosely called a "middle class." This last "class" includes royal functionaries, retainers, or warriors (Davies 1999; Snell 1997, pp. 86–87).

Marxist-inspired analysis points out that such a "middle" class was merely an appendage of the ruling class, belonging to the various groups of court functionaries. The basic class formation was an opposition between two, a ruling class (termed variously exploiters, urban creditor, governors, commercial, rich, privileged, powerful, elite) versus those ruled (called exploited, peasants, people of the land, governed, poor, powerless) (Gottwald 1999a, 1992b, 2001, 1992a; 2008, pp. 10–11; Frick 1977, pp. 100–103; Clines 1995, p. 125; Fritz 1995,

p. 188; Sneed 1999, 2004; Mandell 1999; Boer 1996, 2003; Horsley 1996, pp. 118–130; 2007, pp. 58–70; 2008; Carter 2008, p. 120; Belo 1981, pp. 61–4). Chirichigno uses a curious terminology based on categories of “freedom,” oscillating between three classes for Mesopotamia (free citizens, semifree citizens, unfree chattel slaves) and two for Israel (free citizens and chattel-slaves, Chirichigno 1993, pp. 49–54, 139–142). This terminology is problematic, since it is over-determined by the rhetoric of freedom within (capitalist) liberal ideology. Noticeably, the terminology here ranges from very loose (rich and poor) to more specific (ruling class, exploited class).

Gottwald's Class Analysis. Two matters deserve fuller attention, one the extensive and systematic treatment of class in the benchmark work of Norman Gottwald, and the other a specific issue, whether the state can be a class (a position assumed by many of those mentioned earlier). In *The Tribes of Yahweh*, Gottwald famously argued that ancient Israel (itself largely Canaanite) arose as a new socio-economic formation in response to Canaanite oppression, establishing a communitarian mode of production over against a tributary one. In this case, “Israel” is itself a class as a whole, namely the exploited who break away from their exploiters. In opposing Canaanite dominance as well as Egyptian imperial dominance, “Israel” became a distinct entity: “A class in itself, hitherto a congeries of separately struggling segments of the populace, has become a class for itself” (Gottwald 1999b, p. 489). The implication is that as a distinct class for itself, class conflict was not a notable feature of that new society. Thus, he focuses on the slippery terms for tribal organization (a late development in terms of “retribalization”): *šebet* and *matteh* as tribe, *miš-pāhāh* and, in its armed form, *‘elep*, as a protective association of families, and then at the tertiary level, *bayith* and *bêth-’āv* as an extended family (Gottwald 1999 [1979], pp. 239–292).

In the very different and later situation of the monarchy, class conflict does occur, for it is a return to a tributary mode of production. Class relations change within fundamentally different economic

systems. Elsewhere, Gottwald has argued that Lamentations arises from dispossessed peasantry and exploited classes left behind during the Babylonian exile (Gottwald 1962; 1993a, pp. 165–173). By contrast, Deuteronomy comes from a Josianic ruling elite keen to reclaim lost land and power through centralization in Jerusalem, thus denying any status to local religion, social groupings, and economics (Gottwald 1993b, pp. 12–14). In this situation (a return to a “tributary” mode of production), Gottwald argues for the indispensable hermeneutical role of class in biblical interpretation (Gottwald 1993b). He provides a comprehensive statement of class dynamics:

The key Marxian analytic concepts are *class* as determined by relation of people to the *mode of production* understood as a combination of the *material forces of production* (including human physical and mental powers) and the *social relations of production*, the latter meaning the way that producers (and nonproducers where there is class) organize their work and appropriate the labor product. Class is seen to exist when some people live off the labor product of others. This living off the labor product of others is called *exploitation* in the objective sense that the value of one laborer's production, over and above that laborer's need for subsistence, is appropriated by someone else. This labor product beyond the subsistence need of the laborer is called *surplus product* which is also *surplus value* because the exploiter consumes or exchanges the *good* of the object produced thereby denying the producer the use or exchange of the object that embodies the producer's labor. . . . Similarly, then, *class conflict* is . . . an objective description in that producers and nonproducers struggle to increase, diminish, or arrest the appropriation of labor surplus. (Gottwald 1993a, pp. 147–148; see Gottwald 1999a, p. 10; 2008, pp. 10–11)

Class exists where there are producers and nonproducers (who do not work but live off the result of what the producers make) and where these classes are unequal in terms of power, specifically through exploitation. Thus, producers are denied a portion of their product, which is removed for the

consumption of others in positions of power. Given this situation in monarchic Israel, Gottwald argues for two categories of the ruling class: state functionaries obtaining their living through taxes and land rent and latifundiaris who extended their holdings by appropriating land through unpaid debt and then granting credit to peasants by allowing them to continue to work the land now appropriated. He also identifies two categories within the exploited class: free agrarians with land tenure and tenant farmers who, having lost their land through debt closure, work the land of the latifundiaris. Exploitation took place in a twofold cycle of extraction: state taxation in labor and produce and state-induced credit-debt (Gottwald 1992a, pp. 84–85).

The situation is compounded by the two levels at which class operates in much of Israelite history, for not only are there class relations within Israel, but Israel must engage with various imperial forces that exercised differing degrees of control over it. Thus, Israel as a whole becomes the exploited *class* and the external imperial power becomes the ruling class. Even this is deceptively simple, since many different lines of relationship existed between ruling and exploited classes in Israel, their counterparts in other corners of the empire, and ruling and exploited classes in the imperial center. For instance, after the collapse of the monarchy, most of the ruling class went into exile in Babylon and a sizeable portion of a very depressed peasantry remained in Israel. The subsequent restoration of a portion of the ruling class led to their return to influence but also to continual clashes with the peasantry left behind during the exile. The shifting nature of these relationships finally confronted the more efficient Roman practice of using slaves, which became dominant after the defeat of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Throughout Israelite history the nature of the class relationships varies, depending upon the dominant mode of production at any particular time, whether communitarian, tributary or slave-based (Gottwald 1992b).

Is the State a Class? Most analyses of class in ancient Israel assume that the ruling class is identical with the state, or temple-city complex, and its

functionaries. This assumption faces a significant theoretical hurdle, namely that the state is distinct from class and is indeed generated out of class conflict. The way this common conjunction of state and ruling class, assumed by many scholars, emerges is through a narrative of differentiation, by which the despotic state is formed. It goes as follows: under certain conditions (soil fertility, rainfall, trade, or booty) the differentiation of wealth and power sets in and is concentrated in the hands of certain individuals. So class begins when a certain group is disconnected from the production of essential items for survival. This class then relies on those who do produce these essentials and must extract a surplus from them, usually in a mix of coercion and persuasion (technically known as exploitation). With further concentration of wealth and power, chieftains and towns appear. Then, when the extraction of essential items becomes sufficiently complex and requires defense of such wealth, the state and its (usually despotic) ruler emerge. This state is, according to this narrative, identical with the ruling class. Such a narrative is widespread within and without biblical criticism (Lemche 1988, pp. 22–23; Davies 1988, pp. 59–73; Gottwald 2001; Dever 2001; Kautsky 2007 [1908]; Anderson 1974).

A major problem with this narrative is its direction, since it leads inexorably to the conclusion that the concentration of power in a small group is the development of the state; that is, the exploiting class is the same as the state. From here a series of assumptions follow: the state-cum-exploiting class then exploits the village communes, or tribes, and from this point an irresolvable tension is postulated between the state and the village-based tribe (Lemche 1998, pp. 98–100; Simkins 1999; Yee 2003, pp. 60–63; Liverani pp. 75–76; Krader 1975, p. 292). Identifying the problem with this argument begins with the observation from Hindess and Hirst (1975, pp. 192–193) that the identification of the state with the exploiting class is nonsensical in terms of development of the state. The reason is that state and class cannot be identical. We may go a step further: if the state is not the result of the concentration of power and wealth in a small ruling elite, if

it is not the same as the city-based ruling class, composed of the chieftain or tyrant and his small group of exploiters, then what is the state? It is the outcome of, and effort to mediate, class conflict. That is, the state emerges between the exploiters and the exploited, between the power and wealth concentrated in a small ruling class and the resilient agricultural basis of the village-commune.

Without Biblical Scholarship. Outside of biblical scholarship, two significant contributions may be identified, one from Karl Kautsky's comprehensive effort to provide the first historical materialist analysis of biblical societies, and the other from Soviet-era Russian contributions to ancient Near Eastern scholarship.

Karl Kautsky. Kautsky (2007 [1908], pp. 33–35, 177–178, 352–359, 384–391) also deploys a narrative of differentiation to account for the rise, not only of the mode of production of biblical societies, but also of class. This narrative moves from an undifferentiated state to one of differentiation, with which comes division of labor, exploitation, and class.

Concerning ancient Israel, Kautsky assumes with the majority of biblical scholars at his time that early Israelites were desert nomads, probably Bedouin. Such a life on the move provided a vital and relatively simple life. However, when these nomads settled in Canaan, they adopted agricultural life on the land. From here differentiation sets in, with some gaining wealth on the land at the expense of others. Wealthy landowners began appropriating ever more land, which they then rented to landless peasants at punitive rates. When these peasants inevitably failed to meet the exorbitant requirements to repay their debts—usually a portion of the produce of the land—they forfeited their rights to the land and were driven to the position of debt-slaves of those same landowners. The move into a slave-based mode of production was inevitable. With this formation, the basic class distinctions are in place: slaves produce the necessary surplus, along with some peasants who are not as central to the production of surplus, and that surplus is appropriated by the ruling class, made up mostly of landowners.

The development in relation to Greece and Rome, the context for the New Testament, is roughly similar, although the result is now chattel-slavery. As differentiation sets in from a prior undifferentiated state, more and more people are removed from production as exploiters, whether wealthy landowners, chieftains, clergy, or a scribal subclass. The outcome is a labor shortage. Not enough manpower is available to till the soil, especially since production is primarily agricultural. The first full mode of production arises from this problem of labor shortage, and the resolution is slavery at the expense of freemen. The Greeks and Romans opted to find slaves primarily by conquest in order to fill the labor shortage. The result was a slave-based mode of production.

Kautsky's basic argument for the Hellenistic world has stood the test of time, but not that concerning ancient Israel (which was not primarily a slave system introduced by nomads). However, beyond the misgivings expressed earlier concerning such narratives, a number of questions may be raised (Boer 2009, pp. 91–119). To begin with, Kautsky's argument has theological echoes from the "fall" narrative of Genesis 2–3. That is, the deeply influential nature of that mythical narrative continues to influence historiography, which requires its own narrative structures in order to make sense (White 1973). Inevitably, those narratives redeploy older narratives despite the claims to "scientific objectivity." Further, the narrative of differentiation in Kautsky's hands assumes a version of primitive communism in the prior undifferentiated agricultural life of early Rome or the nomadic life of the Israelites before they settled down in Canaan. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that no undifferentiated state ever existed. This narrative also assumes a relatively linear path, from undifferentiated to differentiated, without considering ruptures, breaks, multiple paths, and fold-backs. And it leaves unresolved the crucial question of the initial trigger for differentiation. On the last point, Kautsky prefers a naturalist argument, citing soil inequality, climate differences, and the role of natural disasters, such as drought or flood affecting crop

yields. The problem of the trigger for differentiation is, however, generated by the narrative itself. That narrative needs a moment of differentiation for the narrative to exist at all. For instance, the narrative structure of Genesis would not exist without the account of disobedience in Genesis 2–3. Imagine a story that remained within the garden, with the first humans meandering about and eating freely from the fruit of the garden, chatting with the deity in the evenings—it would be chronically boring. It therefore needs to be asked what a very different account, without a prior, nondifferentiated state would look like. It would certainly not require differentiation and its trigger.

Soviet-Era Russian Scholarship. The second major contribution from outside biblical criticism comes from neglected Soviet-era Russian scholarship. Deliberations of class took place with the context of debates over the appropriate mode of production for the ancient Near East. Critics variously favored over time the Asiatic mode of production, feudalism, and a slave-based system (Dunn 2011 [1982]; D'iakonoff 1969b; D'iakonoff and Kohl, 1991). In contrast to Western scholarship, where feudalism long held sway (Schloen 2001), it was only briefly considered viable in Russia in the first years of the 1930s. A key moment for the dominance of a slave-based mode of production in that scholarship happened in 1933. In an influential lecture (of four hours!) at the Academy of the History of Material Culture in Leningrad, V. V. Struve sidelined feudalism as a viable term (Struve 1969a). With a broad sweep covering all of the key documents in the histories of Mesopotamia and Egypt, he persuaded most scholars that the evidence pointed toward a slave mode of production. Although slaves were numerically inferior to other classes, such as free laborers or landholders, these slaves were owned collectively by the state and temple complex, worked the whole year and were, therefore, the dominant means for the extraction of surplus value.

After Struve's decisive intervention, scholars took different paths. Some followed and refined his argument (Tyumenev 1969a, 1969b) with debates over the nature of labor and class through detailed

exegesis of the available documents (Struve 1969b; Dandamaev 2009 [1974]); others began to distinguish between immature forms of slaveholding society and its mature form in Greece and Rome (Struve himself); yet others argued that the means of coercing large parts of the population into slavery did not exist in the ancient Near East (D'iakonoff 1974), indeed that the bulk of produce was created by free laborers. Gradually, under the weight of further evidence, debate, and myriad qualifications—including a bold effort by Tyumenev (1969b) to argue that apart from the rulers everyone in the whole ancient East was in fact a slave and that Greece and Rome constituted aberrations—Struve's position crumbled (D'iakonoff 1969a, 1974, 1991). As the slave mode of production began to falter, the Asiatic mode of production, now with an impressive array of new data, re-emerged from the wings to reclaim the field (Dunn 2001 [1982], pp. 144–153). Under that mode of production the primary class distinction was that between an exploiting class that sought to extract a minimal “surplus”—although it often cut into the subsistence requirements—of a large class of agricultural producers with its various categories and groups.

Future Directions. Much analysis remains to be done concerning class in biblical societies. The following focuses on two of those questions. A crucial question is that of compulsion, namely, the factors that led to the majority of people in an economic system to play by its unwritten rules. Why did peasants remain so, or slaves, or the ruling class and its various categories? We may distinguish between direct economic compulsion and extra-economic compulsion, although most socioeconomic formations include a mix of the two. For example, under capitalism economic compulsion is primary, taking the form of income differentials and the drive to own capital. Workers are penalized or rewarded with lower or higher wages (the latter more “desired”) in order to ensure that they remain within the system. This system is reinforced at an ideological level by the assumption that one must pay higher wages in order to attract the best person to an important job. Conversely, one assumes that a

low-skilled position (cleaner or waiter) attracts a lower wage. The list of extra-economic motivations is potentially endless: the status, freedom and security that wealth brings; the potential for all to become wealthy; the need to provide for one's children. However, other economic systems operate with different modes of compulsion. Communist societies find that the economic element of working for the collective is not sufficient, so inevitably resort to extra-economic "cults" of the revolutionary leader in order to provide motivation for working for the cause and collective identity. Feudalism developed a complex pattern of extra-economic justification, both philosophical and theological, for a complex social and economic hierarchy that began with serfs at the wide base, leading all the way up to the singular monarch who was God's appointee on earth.

By contrast, the extra-economic compulsion of the ancient Near East was centered on the sacred. The myriad and overlapped assumptions, customs, daily habits and institutions (kinship structures, judiciary, patron-client relations, the military, government, even taxation in the form of the tithe) sought their models in religious myths of origin that justified the status quo, and provided patterns of divine sanction and punishment to ensure people largely contributed to the system. In this context, class structures were able to be maintained, albeit not without periodic crises which were also built into the pattern of sacred compulsion—as punishment for waywardness. A significant factor, in both the ancient Near East and in the Hellenistic world, was the use of force, usually military. Should a particular group or a vassal state not wish to play by the rules, the local or imperial government had no hesitation in ensuring conformity through the deployment of brute force.

A second issue worthy of further investigation is the nature of class consciousness (the subjective factor of class). In this situation we have mostly the records of those from the ruling class, or at least from the subsection of the scribes. In the biblical texts, the subtleness of that class consciousness may be examined in detail. However, evidence of peasant or slave class consciousness in any

systematic fashion is difficult to identify. As Ste. Croix forcefully puts it in relation to the Hellenistic world, "these [the peasants] are the voiceless toilers, the great majority—let us not forget it—of the population of the Greek and Roman world, upon whom was built a great civilization which despised them and did all it could to forget them." (Ste. Croix 1981, p. 210). Archaeological data may provide a good picture of settlement patterns, agricultural practices, and social organization, but the only resource for such a class consciousness comes from the texts written by scribes in the service of the ruling class. In order to identify at least some parts of that comprehensive class consciousness, one must isolate elements of folk stories from ruling class assumptions and attempt to reconstruct a very different sense of class identity. Such a picture will always be fragmentary and speculative, since the complexity of the sense of identity—through stories, beliefs and patterns of daily life—remain outside the zones of historiography.

[See also Cross-Cultural Exegesis; Cultural-Historical Criticism; Cultural Studies; Economics and the Bible; Empire Studies and Biblical Interpretation; Ideological Criticism; Materialist Criticism; Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation; Social Sciences, *subentry* Hebrew Bible; and Social Sciences, *subentry* New Testament.]

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COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Cognitive linguistics is a set of analytic approaches working to build linguistic analyses that are consistent with what we know about cognition. It begins with the recognition that language expresses human thoughts, and linguistic structure therefore both shapes cognitive patterns and is shaped by them. This basic phenomenological observation—the interconnection of language and cognition—has been the subject of an immense range of scientific study in the last several decades. Within cognitive science, the picture of human cognition has become more clearly based in embodied, culture-specific human experience. Obviously, scholars interpreting texts—including biblical scholars—approach those texts with assumptions about language and culture, meaning and epistemology, which in turn shape their understanding of reading, authority, and interpretation. New understandings of some of these key areas thus present opportunities and challenges to biblical scholars.

Cognitive linguistics sees meaning and contextualized usage as central to the study of language, thus standing in contrast to structuralist or generative approaches that study language as a set of abstract syntactic structures and formal rule systems. Further,